

OBSERVATIONS
ON THE ARISTOCRACY
IN BYZANTIUM

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AT the Symposium of 1957, which was devoted to the Byzantine world in the seventh century, we spoke about the radical changes which, during that period, affected every facet of life in the Eastern Empire. It was then that the Late Roman state faded away, and mediaeval Byzantium, an entity profoundly different from the Empire of Justinian's days, came into being. With the introduction of the theme system there arose a new form of provincial administration and a new military organization, the ethnic composition of the provincial population was substantially altered, the cultural life of the Empire in all its manifestations acquired new traits. But the most decisive change of all was the one affecting the social structure. It is indeed the upheavals in the social and economic spheres that force us to view this period as marking a break in the development of the Eastern Roman Empire, and, at the same time, enable us to take it as the starting point for the remarks which I should like to present to you today.

In the late Roman Empire, as is well known, big landholding was constantly on the increase, while the peasant population was losing its independence. Large estates with their dependent *coloni* were dominant in the provinces of the Empire. In the early Middle Ages the picture changes completely. The internal crisis, which for a long time had been eroding the organism of the Roman Empire and which became particularly acute in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, undermined the position of the old aristocracy, while its economic basis was destroyed by the hostile invasions into the eastern provinces and the Balkans. As a result, small landholding now came to the fore. Petty landholders, peasants living in communes, and the soldiers of the new thematic army became the bulwark of mediaeval Byzantium. The ethnic composition of this emerging class of independent peasants and *stratiotai* must have been very mixed. Masses of foreign newcomers settled on deserted territories. The Byzantine government consciously encouraged this colonization: by assigning lands to the newcomers, especially to the Slavs who had invaded the Balkans, it was giving new strength to ravaged areas. Byzantium was undergoing a process of "barbarization," i.e., a process of internal renewal and rejuvenation that lasted from the seventh to the ninth century.

It is against this background that one ought to examine the social development of Byzantium during the early Middle Ages. The old landholding gentry disappeared from view as a leading class. The social structure of the Empire acquired for a time a relative homogeneity, but this was, of course, a transitory phenomenon. Inevitably, land ownership passed into fewer hands, which led to a growing social differentiation, i.e., to the formation of a new aristocratic class. This aristocracy was naturally recruited from the upper ranks of the theme-organization which had become the foundation of the mediaeval Byzantine State.

In the narrative sources referring to the events of the eighth and ninth centuries we occasionally encounter evidence for the concentration of consider-

able landed ownership and great wealth. Thus, the well-known story of Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the *Vita Basilii* tells us, not without obvious exaggeration, of the enormous estates and countless treasure of the Peloponnesian widow Danelis, the protectress of the future founder of the Macedonian dynasty.¹ Likewise, the Life of St. Philaretos the Almsgiver, composed in 821/22, but describing conditions in the second half of the eighth century, portrays—even if it overstates—the great wealth of its hero, a native of Paphlagonia.² As has often been remarked, family names begin to appear in Byzantium from the second half of the eighth century, this being a clear sign of the emergence of a hereditary aristocracy.³ We have to do here with the military leaders and higher dignitaries of the theme-organization, the founders of the famous aristocratic houses of Byzantium.⁴

The growth of the thematic gentry is clearly reflected in the legislation of the Emperor Leo VI (886–912). Yielding to the tendency of the aristocracy to increase its estates, one of Leo's Novels⁵ abrogates the older regulation forbidding officials to acquire property in the area placed under their authority without the emperor's permission.⁶ The same emperor recommends that the *strategoi* should be appointed from among rich and noble persons: as Leo's *Tactica* has it, "Let a good, noble and rich man be named *strategos*."⁷ True, the same *Tactica* contains a moralizing passage to the effect that nobility should be evaluated not according to one's ancestors, but according to one's deeds and achievements, and that the *strategoi* should be distinguished by their own rather than by ancestral virtues; it is even stated that *strategoi* who do not have glorious ancestors better fulfill their responsibilities, eager as they are to compensate by their own feats for their low birth.⁸ It seems that we encounter here two opposed views, and we may observe a certain hesitation between the old classless maxims and the new respect for the growing aristocratic class.⁹ Coming back to the qualities requisite in a military leader, the author of the *Tactica* solves the dilemma with the following compromise: There is no obstacle to having a commander who is rich and noble not only by birth, but also in spirit.¹⁰

If we now turn to the Strategicon of pseudo-Maurice, we see that the question concerning the family origin of a general is not even posed. According to this work of the early seventh century, a commander ought to be a good Christian and a just man (θεοφιλείας καὶ δικαιοσύνης . . . φροντίζειν), and no more.¹¹ This differ-

¹ Theophanes Continuatus, ed. Bonn, 227ff., 316ff.

² Ed. M. H. Fourmy and M. Leroy, *Byzantion*, 9 (1934), 112ff.

³ See the recent study by A. P. Každan, "Ob aristokratizacii vizantijskogo obščestva VIII–XII vv.," *Zbornik radova Vizant. Inst.*, 11 (1968), 47ff.

⁴ Cf., e.g., Theophanes, ed. de Boor, I, 440.26, where Michael Melissenos is mentioned, appointed by Constantine V *strategos* of the Anatolic theme.

⁵ *Nov. Leonis* 84: Zepos, *Jus graecoromanum*, I, 152f.

⁶ Cf. *Cod. Just.*, I, 53, 1.

⁷ *Tactica Leonis*, const. II, 21, ed. Vári, I, 29. Cf. M. Mitard, "Le pouvoir impérial au temps de Léon VI le Sage," *Mélanges Diehl*, I (1930), 215ff.; R. Guiland, "La noblesse de race à Byzance," *Byzantinoslavica*, 9 (1948), 307ff.

⁸ *Ibid.*, const. II, 19–20, ed. Vári, I, 27–29.

⁹ Cf. Každan, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ *Tactica Leonis*, const. IV, 3, ed. Vári, I, 50.

¹¹ Ed. Scheffer, 3–4. Cf. Každan, *op. cit.*, 48.

ence is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the Strategicon of pseudo-Maurice was a basic source of Leo's *Tactica* from which the latter made substantial and often literal borrowings. Of course, the *Tactica* contain certain additions and changes required by the conditions of the time, and this is precisely the case in the discussion of the qualities of a military leader: while repeating the commonplaces about the requisite moral virtues, the *Tactica* brought to the fore a problem that had not existed in the days of pseudo-Maurice, but had since gained actuality. The same commonplaces concerning the importance of good works, inspired by the spirit of traditional rhetoric, continued to be reiterated in later documents, while in reality the requirement of noble birth, which is stated clearly enough but not without some hesitation in the *Tactica* of Leo VI, became more and more dominant.

It is significant in this connection that in the accounts of the promotions of dignitaries contained in the *Book of Ceremonies* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the demes, in saluting the newly appointed person, make a point of emphasizing his noble birth. We have, for example, a detailed description of the ceremonial acclamations of the demes and their cantors after the appointment of patricians. Pointing first to the gracious emperors as to the originators of the promotion that had been made, the cantors exclaim, "Welcome thou, appointed by our benefactors (καλῶς ἦλθες, προβολή εὐεργετῶν) !" "Welcome thou, beloved by the sovereigns (καλῶς ἦλθες, ποθητὲ τῶν ἀνάκτων) !" Then: "Welcome thou, who art of noble ancestors (καλῶς ἦλθες, ὁ εὐγενὴς ἐκ προγόνων) !" And finally: "Welcome so-and-so, patrician of the Romans (καλῶς ἦλθες ὁ δεῖνα, πατρικίᾳ τῶν Ῥωμαίων) !" Every time the demes repeated "Welcome!"¹² Thus, the glorification of the noble ancestry of the person appointed became a regular part of the ritual followed at the promotion of dignitaries, including that of thematic *strategoi* who often bore the title of patrician.

The *Book of Ceremonies* also contains the complete text of the acclamations prescribed for the promotion of the Prefect of Constantinople. In view of the particular importance of the governor of the capital, these acclamations are more prolonged and ceremonial, but their structure is the same. Here, too, the cantors of the demes celebrate the noble origin of the appointee with the same greeting: καλῶς ἦλθες, ὁ εὐγενὴς ἐκ προγόνων.¹³ Thus, by the first half of the tenth century the Prefect of Constantinople, who is styled the "Father of the City" (πατὴρ πόλεως),^{13a} normally came from the aristocratic class. This information is worthy of note. It proves that the Byzantine gentry had succeeded in securing its position in the government apparatus, and that access to its highest posts, at one time open to everybody, had become a privilege of a hereditary aristocracy.

¹² *De Caerim.*, ed. Bonn, I, 253.5 ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 267.2. The *Book of Ceremonies* has preserved the full text of the demes' acclamations for the promotions of only a few classes of dignitaries, but there can be no doubt that similar acclamations were also made at the promotions of other important officials of the court. A reference to the noble origin of *protospatharii* occurs in the midst of acclamations connected with the promotion of patricians (*ibid.*, 253.19).

^{13a} *Ibid.*, 264.12, 528.2.

The growing importance of the aristocracy is undoubtedly the most significant phenomenon in the internal history of Byzantium in the tenth century. This gave a new direction to the social development and caused an upheaval in existing conditions. The "powerful" (οἱ δυνατοί) quickly expanded their landholdings by absorbing the plots of petty owners. The peasants and *stratiotai* became dependent *paroikoi* on the estates of big landowners, while the government lost its soldiers and its most reliable taxpayers.

In this context there arose a prolonged and determined struggle between the central authority and the landed aristocracy, of which we are informed by the famous Novels of the Macedonian emperors. Through a series of legislative acts and administrative measures, the government was attempting to halt the absorption of the property of the "poor" (πένητες, πτωχοί), as the petty landowners are called in the imperial Novels, in contrast to the "powerful." I shall not dwell here on the course of this dramatic struggle, since it has been described many times. The only point I should like to make is that, in my opinion, the struggle was waged not between the big and petty landowners, as might appear from the reading of the deliberately rhetorical imperial Novels, but between, on the one hand, the attacking forces of the landed aristocracy, which was striving to dominate the peasants and *stratiotai* who were answerable to the government, and, on the other hand, the central authority which desired to maintain its hold over these people.¹⁴ No matter how powerful the government was at the time, its opposition was doomed to failure. All it could do was to slow down the rise of the landed aristocracy whose eventual victory it could not prevent.

Who, then, were these "powerful" who threatened the existence of that bulwark of the Byzantine state, namely the peasants and the soldiers? They are enumerated in the Novel of the Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus of the year 934 (?). They were the glorious magistri and patricians, persons invested with authorities (ἀρχαίς) and military commands (στρατηγείαις), with a civil or military rank, members of the senate, acting or former archons of the themes, and likewise metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops beloved of God, abbots, ecclesiastical archons, the supervisors of charitable and imperial houses.¹⁵ In a word, they were the powerful of this world who, by virtue of their position and influence, exerted pressure on the "poor." Even more eloquent, if more vague, is the definition contained in the Novel of the same Emperor of the year 922, according to which all those are accounted powerful who, either by themselves or through the agency of their friends or by the promise of some benefit, are able to inspire fear in the poor and force them to alienate their lands.¹⁶ These definitions have a clearly marked social aspect,¹⁷ even if it is difficult to distinguish here between the social and the economic sides of the question.

¹⁴ Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *Quelques problèmes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine* (Brussels, 1956), 11 ff.

¹⁵ Zepos, *Jus*, I, 209; Dölger, *Regesten*, No. 628.

¹⁶ Zepos, *Jus*, I, 203; Dölger, *Regesten*, No. 595.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Lemerle, "Esquisse pour une histoire agraire de Byzance," *Revue hist.* (April-June 1958), 271.

Genetically, the Byzantine aristocracy arose from the upper ranks of the services, but its power was determined both by service position and by wealth—especially landed wealth—and it is thanks to this combination that the expansion of the “powerful” proved irresistible. To put it more simply, the “powerful” man was at the same time a landholder and a government official. The central authority was therefore faced with a compact front that was economically the strongest and socially the most influential.

The power of the aristocracy manifested itself in external affairs as well. The reoccupation of the most important islands of the eastern Mediterranean and of considerable areas of western Asia that had been lost three centuries previously was carried out under the leadership of the Anatolian aristocracy and was indeed its great historic achievement. In the second half of the tenth century its two most prominent representatives, Nicephorus Phocas (963–969) and John Tzimiskes (969–976), occupied the imperial throne one after the other. It seemed as if the supreme authority had become the prerogative of the Anatolian magnates. Furthermore, the attempted usurpations of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phocas in the early part of the reign of Basil II (976–1025) were put down only after a cruel and prolonged civil war. The well-known addendum to the Novel of Basil II of the year 996 cites as representatives of the inordinate growth of the landholding aristocracy the Cappadocian houses of Phocas and Maleinos, whose power and wealth were allegedly more than a century old at the time.¹⁸ This addendum which, according to the plausible view of Zachariae von Lingenthal,¹⁹ was the work of the Emperor himself, mentions the father and grandfather of the Phocas family, and cites by name the patrician Constantine Maleinos and his son, the magistros Eustathius. It was this same Eustathius who, a short time prior to that, gave a royal reception on his estates for the Emperor Basil II on the latter's return with his whole army from an expedition to Syria. The Emperor was so struck by the immense wealth of this Cappadocian magnate that he asked his host to accompany him to the capital. Eustathius never came back. According to an Arab itinerary, made known by Ernst Honigmann, the estates of the Maleinoi occupied an enormous area, calculated by Honigmann as being 115 km. in extent.²⁰

Basil II was the last emperor who attempted to check the upsurge of the landed aristocracy. Under his successors the opposition on the part of the central government to the economic and political aspirations of the aristocracy was, to all intents and purposes, discontinued. Having won their victory, the aristocracy split into two opposing factions, the military nobility of the provinces and the civil nobility of the capital. At first, it was the latter that gained the upper hand and so held power in the second and third quarters of the eleventh century. This was a time of political decay, but also one of cultural flowering, the dominant class being the most cultivated element in the Empire. Among its achievements was the refounding of the University of Constantinople.

¹⁸ Zachariae von Lingenthal, *Jus graeco-romanum*, III, 310, note 23; Zepos, *Jus*, I, 264, note 24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 311, note 33.

²⁰ E. Honigmann, “Un itinéraire arabe à travers le Pont,” *Annuaire de l'Inst. de philol. et d'hist. orientales et slaves*, 4 (1936), 268 ff.

Under the rule of the urban bureaucratic aristocracy the Senate of Constantinople gained added significance.²¹ Its role had been largely ornamental when Byzantine autocracy was at its height, but now that leadership was assumed by the higher civil servants, i.e., the holders of senatorial rank, the Senate acquired greater importance. Access to the Senate was opened to a broader segment of the capital's population and in this way the urban aristocracy widened the basis of its power.

Given a favorably passive role by the executive, the big landowners, both lay and ecclesiastical, quickly expanded their estates. Furthermore, influential persons were able to acquire revenue from real estate, especially monasteries and monastic lands that were placed under their protection by virtue of the peculiar system of *charistikion*, a system that was widely applied during this period.²² Quite often prominent persons were in charge of several monasteries that had been entrusted to them by the ecclesiastical authorities themselves, if not by the emperor. At the same time the government showed a growing liberality in the granting of special privileges. Exemption from the payment of taxes became a common phenomenon. Not only monasteries, but also important lay landowners came to enjoy financial immunity: while they drew the rates paid by the peasants, they had no obligation vis-à-vis the treasury. Consequently, access to their lands was often forbidden to government officials. In some cases they even enjoyed legal immunity, i.e., they dispensed justice to their own peasants.²³ The landholdings of lay and ecclesiastical lords thus acquired a privileged status, being to a large extent or even completely freed from the intervention of the central government. In other words, the feudalization of the Empire reached a decisive stage. This is the most significant fact of Byzantine social history in the eleventh century. Its consequence was the collapse of the social and economic structure on which the power of the Empire had been founded in previous centuries.²⁴

Some historians do not recognize the existence of feudal relations in Byzantium and object to the very use of the term "feudalism" in speaking of Byzantine conditions. If the dispute is not merely verbal, we should try to make clear what precisely is in question. Now, there can be no doubt that the disagreement is caused not so much by a different evaluation of certain phe-

²¹ Cf. H.-G. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel. Probleme der byzantinischen Verfassungsgeschichte*, S. B. d. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., philos.-hist. Kl. (1966), H. 6.

²² Cf. the important recent study of H. Ahrweiler, "Charisticariat et autres formes d'attribution de fondations pieuses aux Xe-XI^e siècles," *Zbornik radova Vizant. Inst.*, 10 (1967), 1ff., where the older literature is quoted. See also P. Lemerle, "Un aspect du rôle des monastères à Byzance: les monastères donnés à des laïcs, les charistikaïres," *Comptes-rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr. et Belles-Lettres* (Jan.-March 1967), 9ff.

²³ Cf. G. Ostrogorskij, "K istorii immuniteta v Vizantii," *Vizantijskij Vremennik*, 13 (1958), 55ff. = *Byzantion*, 28 (1958), 165ff.

²⁴ The significance of the changes that occurred during this period has been rightly emphasized by the majority of authors who have dealt with the critical years 1025-1081. Cf., e.g., R. J. H. Jenkins, *The Byzantine Empire on the Eve of the Crusades* (London, 1953); P. Charanis, "The Byzantine Empire in the Eleventh Century," in K. M. Setton, *A History of the Crusades*, I (Philadelphia, 1955), 177ff.; S. Vryonis, "Byzantium: The Social Basis of the Decline in the Eleventh Century," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 2 (1959), 159ff. On the other hand, N. Svoronos, "Société et organisation intérieure dans l'Empire byzantin au XI^e s.," *Proceedings of the XIIIth Intern. Congress of Byz. Studies* (Oxford, 1967), 373ff., does not seem to discover any essential changes during this period.

nomena of Byzantine history, as by a different understanding of the concept of feudalism.^{24a} Essentially, the question is this: Should the term feudalism be limited to the Western Middle Ages, or should it be granted a wider connotation, descriptive of a given economic and social condition that was typical not of the countries of western Europe alone? In other words, what is fundamental for our conception of feudalism: is it the complex hierarchical structure of authority that is characteristic of the West, or is it the presence of the seignorial estate peopled by dependent peasants which may be observed both in Western Europe and in Byzantium? If we acknowledge, as we must, that the latter was the base on which mediaeval society was built in the West as well as in late Byzantium, then the expression "Byzantine feudalism" will appear natural and its use will not raise any objections.

I do not, of course, mean to say that the economic and social structure of Byzantium was in all respects similar to that of the West: indeed, complete uniformity did not prevail even among separate countries and areas of western Europe. It is, nevertheless, indubitable that in this respect there was a fundamental kinship among all parts of the mediaeval world. One should note the differences, but one should also note the similarities. Setting aside, therefore, the fruitless discussion concerning the existence of feudalism in Byzantium, one should study its characteristics more thoroughly than has been done in the past, and do so from several points of view. In other words, the question should be considered not only in the economic sphere, but also in that of social and political phenomena.

The rule of the epigones of the Macedonian dynasty and that of the dynasty of the Doukai in the second and third quarters of the eleventh century saw the disintegration of the social and economic order on which the might of the Empire had previously been built. The Comneni created a new order, certain elements of which were to remain valid throughout the entire late Byzantine period. The accession of Alexius Comnenus marked the victory of the military aristocracy, but did not mean that the key executive posts were given to the descendants of those famous families which in the tenth century had led the expansion of the landholding nobility. Instead, it was the family of the Comneni that seized power.²⁵

According to Zonaras, Alexius Comnenus "directed affairs not as if they were public and governmental (κοινὰ ἡ δημόσια); he saw himself not as their administrator (οἰκονόμον), but as their master (δεσπότην), and the imperial palace he both considered and called his private house (οἶκος οἰκεῖος)."²⁶ "Alexius,"

^{24a} For a survey of various views and theories relevant to this point, see Kin-ichi Watanabe, "Problèmes de la 'féodalité' Byzantine. Une mise au point sur les diverses discussions," *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences*, V/1 (Jan. 1965), 31-40; VI/1 (Sept. 1965), 7-24.

²⁵ Cf. the interesting remarks of Ja. N. Ljubarskij in his introduction to the Russian translation of Anna Comnena (Moscow, 1965), 10ff. See also *Istoriija Vizantii*, II (Moscow, 1967), 296ff. The role played by members of the Comnenian family is also emphasized by A. Hohlweg, *Beiträge zur Verwaltungsgeschichte des oströmischen Reiches unter den Komnenen* (Munich, 1965), but he treats this phenomenon chiefly on the level of biographical detail. On the administrative and military reforms of Alexius I, see H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer* (Paris, 1966), 175ff., esp. 197ff.

²⁶ Zonaras, ed. Bonn, III, 766.14-16.

says the same source, "distributed among his relatives and some of his servants (τοῖς συγγενέσι καὶ τῶν θεραπόντων τισίν) cartfuls of money from the public treasury (τὰ δημόσια χρήματα), provided them with ample yearly revenues (χορηγίας ἄδρᾶς ἔτησίους), so that their wealth became excessive; they acquired a suite (ὑπηρεσίαν) of a kind that is more appropriate to emperors than to private individuals, built houses big enough to look like cities and, in point of magnificence, no different from imperial palaces."²⁷ Zonaras was opposed to the policy of Alexius Comnenus and did not refrain from some exaggeration in the expression of his grievances. His statement is, however, supported by the evidence of documents.

From the chrysobull of Alexius I issued to the Lavra of St. Athanasius in August 1084 we know that the Emperor's younger brother, the *Pansebastos* Hadrian, had been granted all the tax revenue of Cassandra (this is the "ample yearly revenue" mentioned by Zonaras), with the result that the monks of Lavra, who owned property in this region, were afraid that, being taxpayers liable to the *pansebastos*, they would be reckoned among his *paroikoi*. The Emperor tried to dispel their fears, but confirmed the fact that the monks of Lavra were obligated to pay to his brother the public taxes on their Cassandra property. He liberated them only from every kind of corvée which Hadrian's men (ἄνθρωποι) had been also demanding.²⁸ An identical situation is portrayed in a *chrysobullon sigillion* addressed by Alexius I to Lavra in October 1092.²⁹ In this document the Emperor liberates a *metochion* of Lavra, situated near Thessalonica, as well as its *paroikoi* from the corvées imposed upon it by the administrators (προνοηταί) of the estates of his brother, the *sebastocrator*, and declares that representatives of the *sebastocrator* will collect from it "only" the taxes due to him (μόνα τὰ ἀνήκοντα τέλη).³⁰ Thus, the Emperor's elder brother, too, the *sebastocrator* Isaac, had been granted tax revenue in the region of Thessalonica.³¹

Alexius Comnenus established a kind of family rule, having surrounded himself with numerous direct relatives and relatives by marriage. From the *Alexiad* of Anna Comnena it may be seen that persons connected with the Comnenian family by kinship or marriage occupied the highest civil and military posts, carried out the most responsible missions, and accompanied the Emperor on campaign. It was they, too, who bore the new sonorous titles introduced by Alexius. Zonaras bitterly complains that while setting apart his own relatives, Alexius "did not show a similar regard to other persons of noble birth,"³² that he did not treat members of the senate with the respect that was due them,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 767.2-8.

²⁸ G. Rouillard and P. Collomp, *Actes de Lavra*, I (Paris, 1937), No. 39.

²⁹ F. Dölger, *Aus den Schatzkammern des Heiligen Berges* (Munich, 1948), No. 14.

³⁰ These τέλη are not "Pachtzinsen," as Dölger thought (*loc. cit.*), but government taxes. In other words, this case is completely analagous to that of the younger brother, the *pansebastos* Hadrian. One must suppose that the region from which the elder brother, the famous *sebastocrator* Isaac, collected revenue for his own benefit was even more considerable.

³¹ For other similar cases, see H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, 213ff.

³² Zonaras, III, 767.8.

and even tried to humiliate them.³³ Indeed, the old noble families, such as those of Phocas, Scleros, Maleinos, are not mentioned in the pages of the *Alexiad*. In their stead there appear new families of more humble origin. Thus, the dynasty of the Comneni relied in the first instance on its relatives who, endowed with extraordinary honors and enormous estates, formed the highest nobility and the main bulwark of the government, while the wider basis on which the newly-created system rested was provided by the middle and lower gentry, from whose ranks emerged the class of the *pronoïars*.

With the collapse of the old class of soldiers, the core of the Empire's military forces in the eleventh century was, once again, formed by foreign mercenaries. But in the period of the Comneni there also appear local armies created by the system of the *pronoia*.³⁴ By means of imperial donation, the *pronoïar* received for his use and administration (εἰς πρόνοιαν) various benefits, in particular landed property together with the *paroikoi* settled on it, in return for which he assumed the obligation of military service. Like the soldiers of the preceding period, the *pronoïars* are called *stratiotai*—the term *προνόϊκιος* was used seldom and only unofficially, while the term *προνότης* had nothing to do with *pronoia*—but on the social scale they formed a sharp contrast to the older soldiers who belonged to the peasant class. The *pronoïars* were knights and masters of the *paroikoi* who tilled their lands.³⁵ As the military undertakings of the Comneni grew in extent, the importance of the *pronoia* system and the role of the *pronoïars* increased correspondingly. The testimony of the sources, meager as it is, leaves no doubt that this system was already in force under Alexius I and John II, and that the distribution of *pronoiai* became particularly widespread under Manuel I, which is understandable in view of this Emperor's far-flung military ventures.³⁶

³³ *Ibid.*, 766.17. Cf. Beck, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel*, 56ff.

³⁴ Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine* (Brussels, 1954), 26ff.

³⁵ The origins of an army of knights, which was later destined to replace the peasant militia of the former *stratiotai*, may be sought at the time of Nicephorus Phocas. This Emperor issued the well-known decree that the estates owned by *stratiotai* should thenceforth have a minimum value of 12 lbs. of gold, instead of 4 lbs. as previously. He explained this measure by the demands of the newly introduced heavy armor (Zepos, *Jus*, I, 255ff.). These heavily armed warriors to whom Nicephorus Phocas wished to guarantee estates of such value could not obviously have been simple peasants. They must have belonged to the lower nobility—the same class from which later sprang the *pronoïars*.

³⁶ Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 26ff.; H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, 214ff.; P. Charanis, "The Monastic Properties and the State in the Byzantine Empire," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 4 (1948), 91. A. Hohlweg, "Zur Frage der Pronoia in Byzanz," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 60 (1967), 288ff., attempts to cast doubt on the existence of the *pronoia* system under the Comneni by pointing out that the relevant evidence of the sources is scanty—a fact that is perfectly well known. However, after a lengthy discussion of the oft-quoted passage of Nicetas Choniates, he admits himself (304) that it concerns the distribution of *pronoiai* under Manuel I. See also the same author's *Beiträge zur Verwaltungsgeschichte des oströmischen Reiches*, 82–93, and the review of this work by H. Ahrweiler, *BZ*, 60 (1967), 116ff., who quite rightly remarks that the chapter concerning the *pronoia* "reste assez confus." Cf. also P. Lemerle, "Recherches sur le régime agraire à Byzance. La terre militaire à l'époque des Comnènes," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 2 (1959), 265ff. In spite of the thorough scepticism which characterizes this article, its author does not doubt the significance of the aforementioned passage of Choniates, and he states that this piece of evidence as well as the mention of *pronoia* in the Lavra document of 1162 (whose indications go back to an earlier period) lead us, as he cautiously says, "à l'origine d'une importante institution byzantine" (280). We may here leave aside his reservation that this institution did not imply either "fiefs militaires" or "une féodalité militaire." We may, however, note that in addition to the Lavra document of 1162 and other documents of the twelfth century, the term *pronoia*

The typical representative of Byzantine aristocracy under the epigones of the Macedonian dynasty and under the dynasty of the Doukai was the civil nobleman who was a member of the senate, whereas under the Comneni it was the knight or *pronoiar* who, as we have already said, usually belonged to the lower or middle gentry. The size of the *pronoiar*'s estate must have corresponded to that of the suite which accompanied him on campaign. The existence of personal suites and, indeed, of military detachments belonging to Byzantine noblemen and generals is amply attested. This is a fact deserving the closest attention.

There exists, it is true, a study by H.-G. Beck devoted to the question of the retinue in Byzantium,³⁷ but this study, interesting and perceptive as it is, constitutes only the first step in the investigation of this phenomenon, being limited to its initial period. Beck is particularly concerned with the analysis of a passage of the biography of Basil I which relates that the young Basil entered the service of Theophilitzes, having determined "to join some powerful and famous person and place himself in the latter's service."³⁸ Beck compares this passage to other evidence of the ninth, tenth, and first half of the eleventh centuries. Most of his comparative material, however, has to do with the *hetairia* which collected round the person of the emperor. This is a phenomenon of a different kind, namely a group of courtiers or, as we might say, a court clique such as ordinarily appears in the entourage of a monarch.³⁹ What interests us is the phenomenon of the specifically mediaeval retinue. The *Vita Basilii* only contains some interesting hints of this phenomenon whose characteristic traits are more fully revealed by later sources.

The Byzantine nobleman was surrounded by a suite, the composition of which was often rather heterogeneous. Its members were called by different names indicative of their subservient position vis-à-vis their master.⁴⁰ The most frequently used terms are ἀνθρωπος, οἰκεῖος or οἰκεῖος ἀνθρωπος which corre-

is already mentioned in the typicon of John II for the Pantocrator monastery of Constantinople, dated October 1136, where it mentions a pronoria of Synadenos, then deceased (A. Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgiĭeskikh rukopisej*, I [Kiev, 1895], 697). This has been pointed out by H. Ahrweiler, *op. cit.*, 220. We need not, therefore, wonder whether or not the *pronoia* system existed under John II. Cf. now G. Ostrogorsky, "Die Pronoria unter den Komnenen," *Zbornik radova Vizant. Inst.*, 12 (1970), 41 ff.

³⁷ *Byzantinisches Gefolgschaftswesen*, S. B. d. Bayer. Akad. d. Wiss., Philos.-hist. Kl. (1965), H. 5.

³⁸ *Vita Basilii*, Theoph. Cont., 223: τῶν δυνατῶν τινι καὶ περιφανῶν προσμῖξαι καὶ εἰς θερραπείαν καὶ δουλείαν ἑαυτὸν ἀποτάξαι καὶ ἀποστῆσαι. Cf. *ibid.*, 224.

³⁹ This confusion of heterogeneous phenomena influences Beck's conclusions. Thus, he explains the existence of a *hetairia* of Theophilitzes (the first patron of Basil the Macedonian) by this person's social prestige. He affirms, however, that in most cases *hetairiai*—he has in view imperial ones, and in particular that of Michael III—were "associations having political and especially conspiratorial aims" (*op. cit.*, 29). Yet, the observations contained in this witty and perceptive article on Basil's role in the *hetairia* of Michael III are not without interest. Gradually, as Beck points out, Basil created, as κύριος, his own group which enabled him to kill Bardas and then Michael III himself. In this way the same person could be simultaneously both δοῦλος and κύριος. Beck notes in this connection: "Die Analogie zum westlichen Lehnswesen, das den Lehnsträger kennt, der zugleich selbst Belehrender einem dritten gegenüber ist, drängt sich auf" (17, note 3). This conclusion, it seems to me, goes rather too far inasmuch as it is based on the example of Basil I and has in view the conditions of the ninth century.

⁴⁰ Some interesting observations on terminology are made by Beck, *op. cit.*, 7 ff.

spond completely to *homo, familiaris* or *domesticus familiaris* current in western feudal society. The term οἰκεῖος was likewise used to denote the position of Byzantine dignitaries in relation to the emperor.⁴¹ Thus, the emperor had his own οἰκεῖοι, while the feudal magnates who were the emperor's οἰκεῖοι, had, in turn, οἰκεῖοι of their own.

Also frequent are the appellations ὑπηρέται, ὑπηρετούμενοι and especially θεράποντες, i.e., "servants." These, however, were not always servants in the normal sense. Thus, while preparing a rebellion on behalf of Isaac Comnenus, Catacalon Cecaumenus revealed his design, in the first instance, "to his servants and relatives" (τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ θεράπουσι καὶ συγγενέσι).⁴² In the battle against the Pechenegs in 1049, which ended with the flight of the Byzantine army, he alone continued fighting, μετὰ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ στὰς θεραπόντων καὶ τινων συγγενῶν ὀλιγοστών.⁴³ The *proedros* Theodosius Monomachus set out against the Emperor Michael VI having gathered his οἰκογενεῖς καὶ δούλους καὶ τοὺς ἄλλως ὑπηρετούμενους αὐτῷ.⁴⁴ We may also recall the complaint of Zonaras to the effect that the relatives of Alexius I acquired too numerous a suite (ὑπηρεσίαν).⁴⁵ His protest is directed only at the size of their suites—"of a kind that befitted emperors rather than private individuals"—and he thereby acknowledges that it would have been normal for them to have suites such as befitted their station.

In helping Isaac Comnenus to gain the throne, the aforementioned Catacalon Cecaumenus contributed two regular regiments and, in addition, his "own people," his οἰκεῖοι.⁴⁶ Consequently, Byzantine generals had their private military units. This fact, whose social and political significance is obvious, is confirmed by a large body of testimony. A soldier belonging to a private retinue is often designated by the term ὑπασπιστής, i.e., a "shieldbearer" or "guard." Rather more rarely we find the equally significant designation ὁπαδός, a "follower." Influential persons had numerous guards of this kind. Thus, Nicephorus Botaniates, the future emperor, while he was *magistros* and *dux* of Antioch, resisted a Turkish attack in 1067 with the help of "his own guards (τῶν οἰκείων ὑπασπιστῶν) and some foreign forces," according to the Continuator of Skylitzes;⁴⁷ while, according to Michael Attaliates, he did so with the help of "local inhabitants and his own guards" (τῶν ἰδίων ὑπασπιστῶν).⁴⁸ Nicephorus Basi-

⁴¹ The word οἰκεῖος assumes this meaning as an official designation. In earlier sources we find with the same connotation the term οἰκιακοί (ἐνθροῶποι) — a fact which Beck, *op. cit.*, 8, note 1, mistakenly denies. Cf. Theophanes, 373.23, 385.25, 400.6, 455.5. These passages referring to events of the eighth century have to do with persons belonging to the entourage of emperors and empresses. The same in *De Caerim.*, I, 174.24, 175.3 and the letter of Theodore of Nicaea, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du X^e siècle* (Paris, 1960), 308.29. Cf. Verpeaux, "Les 'οἰκεῖοι'. Notes d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale," *Rev. des ét. byz.*, 23 (1965), 90.

⁴² Skylitzes-Cedrenus, II, 625.1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 599.12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 612.20. This passage is quoted by Beck, *op. cit.*, 27, who rightly observes that δοῦλοι denote servants in the narrow sense, while the ἄλλως ὑπηρετούμενοι αὐτῷ refer to the suite (Gefolgschaft).

⁴⁵ See *supra*, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Skylitzes-Cedrenus, II, 625.19: τὰ δύο Ῥωμαϊκὰ τάγματα, μετ' ἐκεῖνα δὲ καὶ τοὺς οἰκείους. This formulation expresses as clearly as possible the difference between regular army units entrusted to Cecaumenus by the central authority and the militia consisting of his own people.

⁴⁷ Skylitzes cont., 663.2.

⁴⁸ Attaliates, 96.9. The guards of Nicephorus Botaniates are mentioned *ibid.*, 41.20.

lakes, who raised a rebellion against Michael VII, had among his forces, "not a few of his own guards" (καὶ οἰκείους ὑπασπιστάς οὐκ ὀλίγους).⁴⁹

Of particular interest are the indications given by Cecaumenus, the author of the *Strategicon*. In relating the plot that was hatched in Thessaly while his grandfather, Nikolitzas, was residing there, Cecaumenus says that the plotters were afraid lest Nikolitzas "cause them many worries, *since he has men and his own army*" (ἀνθρώπους γὰρ ἔχει καὶ λαὸν ἴδιον).⁵⁰ Equally instructive in this context is the advice of Cecaumenus that, in the event of a rebellion, one should bring into the fort as much provision "as would be sufficient for yourself, your family, your slaves and the freemen *who will have to mount horses together with you and go into battle*."⁵¹ The term "slaves" (δοῦλοι) means here servants in general, whereas the "freemen" (ἐλεύθεροι) were the actual members of the suite who accompanied their master on campaign, together with his relatives and servants.

The appearance of retinues in Byzantium, as Beck has correctly pointed out,⁵² was not a juridically defined institution and for this reason it has left no trace in official enactments. This is why we have had to avail ourselves of more or less fortuitous indications of the narrative sources. However, the data adduced—and it would be easy to multiply their number—leave no doubt in my mind that the typically mediaeval, feudal *Gefolgschaftswesen* not only existed in Byzantium, but acquired from the eleventh century onward considerable extension. Particularly indicative is the testimony of Cecaumenus whose work reflects a situation that was normal and, indeed, common. In speaking of the feudal retinue, he has in view not the great magnates who attracted the attention of the chroniclers, but that middle aristocracy to which he himself belonged and which he addressed in his admonitions.

We may imagine that *pronoïars*, too, had similar retinues. We have, unfortunately, no direct evidence concerning the structure of the army as based on the *pronoïa* system, a structure that, once again, was not defined by specific regulations.⁵³ However, it is difficult to conceive that owners of patrimonial estates should have had retinues, and *pronoïars* not. Furthermore, the preamble by Alyates to the *praktikon* of a soldier-*pronoïar* (probably of the thirteenth century), recently studied by I. Ševčenko, contains a fairly clear allusion to the retinue accompanying a *pronoïar*.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.21.

⁵⁰ *Cecaumeni Strategicon*, ed. Wassiliewsky-Jernstedt, 68.7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65.4. For further testimony of Cecaumenus which serves to recreate the feudal life of his period, see the informative article by G. G. Litavrin, "Byl li Kekavmen, avtor 'Strategikona,' feodalom?" *Vizant. očerki* (Moscow, 1961), 217 ff.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, 28 ff.

⁵³ Accurate information on the size of *pronoïar* armies exists only for Morea under Latin rule and Zeta under Venetian domination—in both cases there existed prescribed norms. Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 57 ff. and 222 ff. On Zeta, see also I. Božić, "Proniarii et capita," *Zbornik radova Vizant. Inst.*, 8/1 (1963), 61 ff.

⁵⁴ I. Ševčenko, "On the Preface to a Praktikon by Alyates," *Jahrb. d. österr. byz. Gesellschaft*, 17 (1968), 65 ff. The passage that interests us reads ἐκ τοῦ περὶ αὐτὸν πολυαρίθμου συνασπισμοῦ (71.6). Ševčenko translates, "on account of the large numbers in the knight's (?) retinue" (72). In spite of the caution expressed by the question mark and the reservation made in a footnote ("obscure sentence"), this translation is undoubtedly correct and the author's conclusions (70) are convincing, as shown by the comparable passages of Scylitzes and Attaliates quoted *supra*.

The presence of free men in the retinues of Byzantine noblemen shows that persons not belonging to the peasant class could have their own lords from whom they depended instead of being directly subject to the emperor. In other words, there existed within Byzantine feudal relations a certain hierarchy of power, though certainly the feudal ladder did not have as many rungs as it did in the West.

We may quote here the example of Eustathius Boilas, *protospatharios* and *hypatos*, known to us through the will he composed in 1059, a document full of interesting data.⁵⁵ Boilas was an aristocratic landowner who had fairly substantial estates and a considerable number of slaves; yet he had his own lord (αὐθέντης) in the person, first, of the *dux* Michael Apocapes, vicegerent of the region and a magnate of the eastern part of the Empire, and later, after his death, in the person of the latter's son, the *magistros* Basil.⁵⁶ Going down the ladder, Boilas had his own *familiares* (τοὺς οἰκείους μου), and he donated lands not only to his relatives and his freedmen, but also to other persons.⁵⁷

The typicon of the monastery of the Virgin Kosmosoteira near Ainos tells us that in two villages belonging to the *sebastocrator* Isaak Comnenus, third son of the Emperor Alexius I, there were soldiers subject to the *sebastocrator* and paying taxes to him (εἰσὶ τινες στρατιῶται ὑποτελεῖς ἡμῶν).⁵⁸ After the *sebastocrator's* death, they, together with the villages in question, were going to devolve to the monastery.⁵⁹ According to the typicon, these soldiers oppressed their neighbors, "behaved shamelessly" even with regard to the administrator of the *sebastocrator's* estates, and neglected their obligation to pay taxes. And yet, the *sebastocrator* advises the abbot of the monastery to treat them favorably and invite them to his table so as to make them his helpers and friends, capable of repelling brigands by force. It is not easy to determine the social position of these soldiers. They were not, of course, *stratiotai* of the old type belonging to the "poor" class. One may perhaps compare them to the petty *pronoiar*-soldiers that occur in later documents.⁶⁰ In any case, we have here an example of soldiers subject not to the emperor, but, first, to one of the emperor's sons and then to a monastery founded by the latter.⁶¹

⁵⁵ V. N. Beneševič, "Zaveščanie vizantijskogo bojarina XI veka," *Žurnal Minist. Nar. Prosv.*, N.S. 9 (May 1907), 219-231. Cf. S. Vryonis, "The Will of a Provincial Magnate, Eustathius Boilas (1059)," *DOP*, 11 (1957), 263ff., where this remarkable document is translated into English and annotated.

⁵⁶ Beneševič, *op. cit.*, 222.32, 224.3, 222.34.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.7, 223.34-224.2. Cf. A. P. Každan, *Derevnja i gorod v Vizantii IX-X vv.* (Moscow, 1960), 118; *idem*, *Istorija Vizantii*, 2 (Moscow, 1967), 247.

⁵⁸ L. Petit, "Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira près d'Aenos," *Izv. Russk. Arkheol. Inst. v Konstant.*, 13 (1908), 71.14.

⁵⁹ Cf. the typicon of John II Comnenus for the Pantocrator monastery which mentions ἐστρατευμένοι residing in the village Thrymbaki: Dmitrievskij, *Opisanie liturgičeskikh rukopisej*, I, 697.

⁶⁰ E.g., the group of petty *pronoiar*-soldiers from Serres called Clazomenites in the *chrysoboullon sigillion* of John V Palaeologus or of John VI Cantacuzenus of 1342 (Lemerle, *Actes de Kuitumus*, No. 20; Dölger, *Schatzkammen*, No. 16) or the group of the Barbarenoi in a series of acts of the thirties and forties of the fourteenth century. Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 124, 155ff.

⁶¹ If it is true that the soldiers in question were *pronoiar*s, it would be necessary to modify an opinion previously expressed by me, viz. that no *pronoiar*s in the service of a monastery were known in Byzantium (*Féodalité*, 191). In Serbia, where the *pronoia* system was borrowed from Byzantium, this

The center of the *sebastocrator's* very extensive holdings was Neokastron, where, in the *kastron* itself, stood his lordship's manor (οικήματα δεσποτικά). Peasants lived next to it, and it was here, too, that a yearly fair was held. He owned a second *kastron* called Ἀετός (probably on account of its elevated position) together with a village that pertained to it; he also had real estate at Ainos itself, an inhabited trading-place (ἐμπόριον), twelve boats, fisheries on the river Maritsa, and a great number of villages and estates (προάστια).⁶²

The owner of such great possessions must have needed his own administrative apparatus. We have already encountered the "men" (ἄνθρωποι) of the younger brother of Alexius I, the *pansebastos* Hadrian, and the administrators (προνοηταί) of his elder brother, the *sebastocrator* Isaac. As we have just seen, the son of Alexius I, also called the *sebastocrator* Isaac, the founder of the monastery of Kosmosoteira, had his own *pronoetai*. In his typicon he also speaks of his assistants whom he calls the men "closest to me" (οἱ οικειότατοι ἄνθρωποι μου). It is noteworthy that some of these bore titles borrowed from the imperial court. He had not only a secretary (γραμματικός) who was his οικειότατος and κατὰ πάντα ὑποχέριος, but also a *vestiarites* and a *pinkernes*. Isaac bestowed landholdings on all his *familiares*; after their death the villages given to them were to pass into the possession of the monastery.⁶³

One must emphasize the fact that the phenomena described in the typicon of Isaac Comnenus were not at all exceptional. In later documents we often find even on the estates of more humble feudal lords their "men" (ἄνθρωποι) and *familiares* (οἰκεῖοι ἄνθρωποι) who were in their personal service and are clearly distinguished from the dependent peasant population.⁶⁴ The same term ἄνθρωπος also denoted vassals in their relation to the emperor.^{64a}

Of course feudal relationships in Byzantium did not come into being under the influence of Western models, but rather as a consequence of developments

kind of *pronoia* is well known and, indeed, occurs in the earliest Serbian document mentioning the *pronoia* (cf. *Féodalité*, 187 ff.).

An example of a *pronoia* grant made by a feudal magnate is found in a document of the fourteenth century relating to Epirus: the great constable John Tzaphas Orsini Doukas, a vassal of Tsar Symeon (half-brother of Stephen Dušan) bestowed on his nephew and fellow-countryman an estate διὰ προνοίας. See the chrysobull of Tsar Symeon dated January 1361: A. Soloviev and B. Mošin, *Grčke povelje srpskih vladara* (Belgrade, 1936), No. 32.42.

⁶² "Typikon du monastère de la Kosmosotira," par. 69, pp. 52-3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, esp. par. 107 (pp. 69-70) and par. 69 (p. 52). An early example of the granting of court titles to members of a magnate's entourage is found in the *Vita Basilii* (Theoph. Cont., 307.1), where it is told that Apostypes, *strategos* of Thrace and Macedonia, had his own *protostrator* and his own *cubicularius*, the latter being "first among his *familiares*" (πρῶτος τῶν οικειοτάτων αὐτοῦ).

⁶⁴ We may quote here a few characteristic examples from the charters of the monastery of Panagia Lembiotissa near Smyrna, referring to the thirteenth century: Andronicus Xanthos, some members of whose family served as functionaries of the Smyrna metropolis, is mentioned in 1253 as the ἄνθρωπος of Irene, wife of the *protovestiarites* Zagarommates (Miklosich and Müller, 4, 233); another one of her "men" was Theodore Lapardas, who belonged to the same kind of family as Xanthos, and who in 1261 administered one of her estates (*ibid.*, 234). In the same region of Smyrna we find in 1268 the "glorious kyr" Michael Kinnamos who was οικεῖος ἄνθρωπος of the *sebastocrator* Constantine Tornikes (*ibid.*, 89). Cf. H. Ahrweiler, "L'histoire et la géographie de la région de Smyrne entre les deux occupations turques (1081-1317), particulièrement au XIII^e siècle," *Travaux et mémoires*, 1 (1965), 112, 114, 149.

^{64a} E.g., the princes of Lesser Armenia in relation to the Emperor Alexius I: Anna Comnena, ed. Leib, III, 134.4.

within the Empire itself that were the result of the greatly increased power of the Byzantine aristocracy. But closer contacts with the Western world in the era of the Crusades did leave their mark, and Western customs and institutions were adopted the more readily since the ground had been prepared for them by these internal developments. The Empire took over the institution of liege homage, and the term itself was employed (λίλιος, a "liege-man"), though it was used primarily for imperial vassals of Western origin.⁶⁵ Another noteworthy point is that the custom of taking an oath of fealty to the emperor was very widely adopted in the Comnenian period.⁶⁶

This contact with the Western feudal world became especially intimate after 1204, with the appearance of the Latin empire and of a string of Latin princedoms in the Balkans. And in these circumstances it became clear that the state of things which the Western conquerors encountered in their new possessions was quite familiar to them. They could take over a great deal without having to make many changes. There was no essential difference between the Byzantine *pronoia* and the Western fief, and *The Chronicle of the Morea* constantly uses both these terms quite interchangeably.⁶⁷ In describing the Crusaders' conquest of the Peloponnese it provides us with the fullest and most instructive account of the social relationships which came into being in occupied Byzantine territory and of the position of the Byzantine aristocracy under Latin domination. One gets the impression that at the time of the conquest the leading role in the Peloponnese was played by the *pronoïars*, which incidentally shows how important the institution of *pronoia* had then become, and how widely extended it was. Resistance to the invader continued so long as the *pronoïars* sustained it, and they indulged in voluntary submission only on condition of being allowed to retain their *pronoia*-holdings. These holdings were the chief point of contention, one side trying to acquire as many as possible, the other striving to retain control of them wherever it could.⁶⁸

In addition, *pronoia* continued to be an institution of the greatest significance in the peripheral Greek states which sprang up during the period of the Latin empire. It is to be met with in the few sources which refer to Epirus and, more especially, in the comparatively numerous surviving documents from the area of the Nicaean empire. The new states in Asia Minor and Northern

⁶⁵ Cf. J. Ferluga, "La ligesse dans l'Empire byzantin," *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, 7 (1961), 97ff.

⁶⁶ This has been pointed out by N. Svoronos, "Le serment de fidélité à l'empereur byzantin et sa signification constitutionnelle," *REByz*, 9 (1952), 106ff., who rightly observes that the growing feudalization of Byzantium created social relations similar to those of the West. He is guilty, however, of some exaggeration when he speaks of the reciprocal and bilateral character of the oath of fealty in Byzantium and of its full correspondence to the Western oath (136 and *passim*).

⁶⁷ Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 55ff.

⁶⁸ In the light of these facts, it is difficult to understand the view that the institution of the *pronoia* did not yet exist at this time: so D. Jacoby, "Les archontes grecs et la féodalité en Morée franque," *Travaux et mémoires*, 2 (1967), 421-81. He attempts to explain away the frequent mention of *pronoiai* and *pronoïars* in the *Chronicle of Morea* regarding the early stages of the conquest of the Peloponnese with the arbitrary assumption that all of these allusions were later introduced by the compiler of the *Chronicle* and reflect, as he thinks, the conditions not of the early thirteenth, but of the early fourteenth century. However, I have not been able to find in his lengthy study any positive proof that might have justified this hypothesis.

Greece were set up through the vigor and power of the Byzantine aristocracy; so it was natural that its representatives should occupy the controlling position in them. The social system which evolved was in all essentials similar to that which had come about under the Comneni and had been so characteristic of their epoch. On the one hand, we find hereditary estates, sometimes very large ones, in the possession of the higher aristocracy, the people close to the throne; on the other, *pronoia*-holdings, usually less extensive, under the control of *stratiotai*, military men from the ranks of the lesser notables. Such, at any rate, are the *pronoiai* of which we have evidence in the documents from the reigns of Theodore I Lascaris and, more particularly, John III Vatatzes.⁶⁹ It is noteworthy that Western knights are found in service under the Nicaean emperors, alongside Byzantine *pronoiar-stratiotai*. One of these Westerners, Syrgares, whom the documents call ὁ λίλιος καβαλλάριος of the Emperor, held several villages in *pronoia* and was constantly engaged in litigation against the neighboring monastery of Lembiotissa—as, for that matter, were also native Byzantine *pronoiards*.⁷⁰

The anti-aristocratic policy followed by Theodore II Lascaris proved to be only a brief episode, and Michael Palaeologus' accession heralded a new triumph for the Byzantine upper class. Depending for support as he did upon the great notables, the new Emperor generously rewarded them with lands and privileges; the *pronoiards* made important gains as well. Breaking sharply with original practice, the Emperor granted his supporters the right to bequeath their *pronoia*-holdings⁷¹ and from that time onward, particularly in the fourteenth century, this concession was made more and more frequently. At the same time the estates of the *pronoiards* became larger and larger. Although the heritable *pronoia* did not lose its most characteristic feature and remained essentially a conditional tenure to which certain defined services were attached, nevertheless, these developments inevitably blurred the lines of demarcation between *pronoia* tenure and hereditary property, and, in so doing, reflected the basic features of the Empire's internal development under the Palaeologi; the strengthening of the land-owning aristocracy and the concurrent weakening of the central power, together with its ever-increasing pliability in face of the demands of the notables.

The holding of large estates, fortified by privilege, which had become the chief factor in Byzantine social history in the eleventh century, reached its apogee during the Palaeologan empire, especially in the fateful era of the fourteenth century. Never had the territorial possessions of the greater feuda-

⁶⁹ Cf. H. Glykatzi-Ahrweiler, "La politique agraire des empereurs de Nicée," *Byzantion*, 28 (1958), 51ff., 135f. Cf. also P. Charanis, "On the Social Structure and Economic Organization of the Byzantine Empire in the Thirteenth Century and Later," *Byzantinosl.*, 12 (1951), 94ff., and "The Aristocracy of Byzantium in the Thirteenth Century," *Studies in Honor of A. C. Johnson* (Princeton, 1951), 336ff. In his valuable comments, Charanis does not always distinguish sufficiently between hereditary estates and *pronoiai*. Thus, it does not appear from the sources that the *parakoimomenos* Constantine Ducas Nestongus, the Emperor's uncle, was a *pronoiar* (344); the same should be said of the magnates enumerated on 345 and 346.

⁷⁰ Cf. Charanis, "Social Structure," 97ff.; "Aristocracy," 341ff.

⁷¹ Pachymeres, I, 321.8. Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 94ff.

tories and the most celebrated monasteries grown so rapidly, and never had privileges been granted to them on so wide a scale as during this period when the Byzantine State was inexorably declining.

The surviving contemporary documents that throw light on this state of things come, of course, from monastic archives and in the great majority of cases they have to do with monastic properties. This circumstance must affect our overall picture and may, to some extent, distort the perspective in which we view the development of large-scale landholding in Byzantium, since we have a much better and more direct view of the monastic situation than of the secular one. However, in studying the documents we observe that monastic lands are constantly found adjoining those of secular feudatories, whether hereditary owners or *pronoïars*, with whom the monks frequently come into conflict. Unquestionably, the lands of the leading monasteries had grown more and more extensive, but secular estates had not lagged behind, especially those of people who had managed to become influential at court.

With the growth in the material wealth of the aristocracy it was natural that their social status should also be enhanced, as well as their influence in determining the most vital affairs of state. The impoverished Empire fell into material dependance upon the great families. More than once in the fourteenth century armies were raised and warships were built with money donated by wealthy aristocrats. John Cantacuzene himself bears witness to the vast riches that were concentrated in the hands of a number of notable families. Speaking in his *History* of the losses he had suffered as a result of the anti-aristocratic movement, he lists the numbers of livestock belonging to him; 1,000 yoke of draught-oxen, 5,000 cows, 2,500 horses, 200 camels, 300 mules, 500 donkeys, 50,000 pigs and 70,000 sheep.⁷² These enormous figures seem incredible; however, the author would not have cited figures which his readers would think wholly implausible. Riches of this order are all the more striking against the background of the utter impoverishment of the state treasury, and they go a long way toward explaining the upsurge of popular indignation against their owners which broke out in the towns of the Empire during the civil war of the 1340's. In the typical Byzantine village of the times, the peasant who owned a yoke of oxen could consider himself to be well set up; most people had only one or, more often, no draught animals at all, and owners of two yoke of oxen were very rare indeed.⁷³

The anti-aristocratic movement, however, which settled accounts with the supporters of Cantacuzene and forced him to flee in search of help to the court of the Serbian king, did not come into being in the impoverished villages of the countryside. It was in the towns of Thrace and Macedonia that it showed itself in all its bitterness; and in Salonica it led to the ascendancy of the Zealot party, which prevailed for a considerable time (1342-49). This point need not surprise us, for the same land-owning aristocracy that governed the countryside held

⁷² Cantacuzenus, II, 185.4.

⁷³ Cf. Ostrogorskij, "Vizantijskie piscovyie knigi," *Byzantinosl.*, 9 (1948), 253ff. = *Féodalité*, 312ff.

sway in the towns too.⁷⁴ The urban governors came from its ranks, and the town councils were in the hands of its representatives.⁷⁵ Of course, there were merchants and artisans to be found in Byzantine towns, but these "middling people," as the sources call them, were completely overshadowed. The "middling people" in Byzantium were, as a class, not much akin to those rising city-merchants and artisans, animated by a new strength and self-confidence, who were to be found in the West. Not the "middling people" but representatives of the local land-owning notables played the decisive role in the late Byzantine city. This difference, it is worth pointing out, explains better than anything else why Byzantium, which had once occupied a dominating position in world trade, became powerless to compete with the Italian cities and, after being speedily relegated by them to second place, was finally swept out of competition altogether.

The years of the anti-aristocratic movement in the towns of Thrace and Eastern Macedonia and of the Zealot ascendancy in Salonica confronted the Byzantine aristocracy with a serious crisis. The supporters of Cantacuzene, who was the leader of the aristocracy, suffered in particular. Popular indignation turned against them and they were harassed also by the regency in Constantinople. The government of John Palaeologus systematically confiscated its opponents' estates and awarded them to its own supporters. The Byzantine aristocracy was undergoing a process of subdivision, and, associated with this, a certain redistribution of its territorial assets was taking place. In the troublous times of the civil war some suffered losses while others were able to enrich themselves.^{75a} In the final reckoning it was not the aristocracy which lost in the troubles of the 1340's. The real defeat, decisive and irreparable, was that sustained by the Byzantine State, which was completely exhausted by the long and cruel civil war. The imperial treasury was empty. Rich and extensive provinces had been lost. Worse than this, the territory of the Empire had not merely been greatly reduced; it was also losing its unity. Salonica, the greatest city after Constantinople, was cut off by the conquests of Stephen Dušan. Further, the unity of the sovereign authority itself was becoming only a matter of theory.

⁷⁴ On Late Byzantine cities, see E. Kirsten, "Die byzantinische Stadt," *Berichte zum XI. Intern. Byzantinisten-Kongress. München 1958*, 34ff.; A. P. Každan, "Gorod i derevnja v Vizantii v XI-XII vv.," *Actes du XII^e Congrès Intern. d'Etudes byz.*, I (Ochrid-Belgrade, 1963), 31ff., and the subsidiary report of D. Angelov, *ibid.*, 293ff.; E. Frances, "La féodalité et les villes byzantines aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles," *Byzantinosl.*, 16 (1955), 76ff.

⁷⁵ Cf. C. P. Kyrris, "The Political Organization of the Byzantine Urban Classes between 1204 and 1341," *Liber memorialis Antonio Era* (1963), 21ff.; *idem*, "Representative Assemblies and Taxation in the Byzantine Empire between 1204 and 1341," *XII^e Congrès Intern. des Sciences Historiques* (Louvain-Paris, 1966), 47ff.

^{75a} Thus, John Margarites, who had considerable landed possessions in eastern Macedonia and was a supporter of John Palaeologus, received during the civil war a *pronoia* confiscated from a supporter of John Cantacuzenus and a domain confiscated from Cantacuzenus himself. Cf. P. Lemerle, "Un praktikon inédit des archives de Karakala (janvier 1342) et la situation en Macédoine orientale au moment de l'usurpation de Cantacuzène," *Χαριστήριον εις 'Α. 'Ορλάνδον* (Athens, 1964), 278ff.; G. Ostrogorsky, "La prise de Serrès par les Turcs," *Byzantion*, 35/1 (1965), 314ff. After the Serbian conquest, Margarites went on to serve Stephen Dušan, and not only retained his former possessions, but was rewarded with additional ones by his new master.

The idea of dividing up the Empire had been maturing in the minds of some Byzantine magnates for a long time. Right back at the time of the revolt of Bardas Sclerus and Bardas Phocas against Basil II's rule these two rebel leaders came to an agreement whereby, if the revolt had been carried out, one of them would have received the Asiatic portions of the Empire and the other the European. A century later, when plotting the overthrow of Nicephorus III Botaneiates, Nicephorus Melissenus proposed to his brother-in-law Alexius Comnenus a very similar partition. Alexius rejected the plan and was able to satisfy Melissenus by promising him the title of Caesar.⁷⁶ But, as we have seen, Alexius himself, on becoming emperor, rewarded his brothers, if not, indeed, by granting them independent authority to rule over separate provinces, then at least by assigning to them the revenues of these lands. Such grants, it would seem, were one of the root causes of the feudal dismemberment of the Empire.

However that may be, John II Comnenus had, according to Cinnamus, some idea of setting up a separate administration in certain regions of the Empire. If the historian is to be believed, John considered the possibility of making over Cilicia, together with Antioch, Attaleia, and Cyprus, as a hereditary appanage to his son Manuel, with a view to defending it more effectively against the incursions of Raymond of Antioch.⁷⁷

After the collapse of the Empire in 1204, the impulses toward separatism grew stronger and lost no time in asserting themselves. The catastrophe was not only the result of external pressures, but also of internal disruptive forces that had been ripening under the surface. The efforts of Theodore Lascaris to rebuild the Byzantine State in Asia Minor encountered the active opposition of the local magnates Theodore Mancaphas, who had set himself up in Philadelphia as early as 1189, Manuel Maurozomes, who had seized control of the area of the Meander River, and Sabbas Asidenus, who had established a strong position at Sampson near Miletus⁷⁸ and with whom Theodore Lascaris managed to come to an agreement by granting him the title of *sebastocrator*,⁷⁹ just as Alexius Comnenus in his day had made Nicephorus Melissenus caesar.

As the Nicaean empire grew stronger, so did separatist tendencies weaken. However, although they may have died down for the time being, they did not cease to exist under the surface, and they assumed new guises in the restored Palaeologan empire. Furthermore, Epirus and Thessaly lay outside the restored imperial frontiers. The new situation was complicated and inconsistent; hostile relations, frequently leading to armed clashes, alternated with periods of temporary harmony which was strengthened by marriage alliances and the conferring of exalted titles—that of despot to the rulers of Epirus, and *se-*

⁷⁶ Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, ed. Leib, I, 88f.

⁷⁷ Cinnamus, ed. Bonn, 23.1.

⁷⁸ Acropolites, ed. Heisenberg, 12; Nicetas Choniates, 827f., 842.

⁷⁹ Cf. B. Ferjančić, "Sevastokratori u Vizantiji," *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, 11 (1968), 172. The same kind of thing, it seems, happened to Nicephorus Kontostephanos on whom Theodore Lascaris likewise bestowed the title of *sebastocrator* (*ibid.*, 173).

bastocrator to those of Thessaly. In this way the emperors conferred a *de facto* recognition upon these new political units, while considering their rulers to be their own vassals. The lords of Epirus and Thessaly, in their turn, accepted these exalted titles from the emperors and thus implicitly recognized the suzerain rights of the *basileus* (and even, as one contemporary document⁸⁰ informs us, took an oath of fealty to him), although they none-the-less continued to oppose any reunion with Byzantium.

Under the Palaeologi, members of the ruling family disposed of enormous landed possessions. According to Pachymeres, the Despot John, brother of Michael VIII, held in *pronoia* many islands, especially Mitylene and Rhodes, and also numerous extensive tracts on the mainland.⁸¹ In such cases one should not, however, think of *pronoia* in the exact sense of the word.⁸² Probably John Palaeologus merely enjoyed the revenues from these regions, just as the brothers of Alexius I Comnenus had, as we have seen, enjoyed the revenues of certain provinces assigned to them earlier.⁸³

The dismemberment of the Empire, for which the way had thus been prepared by the development of feudal relationships during the preceding centuries, became a fact in the fourteenth. The question of partition was first posed by the Empress Irene, wife of Andronicus II, who demanded that her husband should divide the Empire between their sons. Andronicus refused outright, and the historian of his reign, Nicephorus Gregoras, in dealing with the conflict between the imperial couple about this matter, adds some forceful strictures of his own. "An unheard-of thing," he wrote; "she wanted her sons to govern not monarchically, in accordance with the age-old custom of the Romans, but after the Latin fashion; that is to say, they would divide the towns and districts of the Romans amongst themselves and each son would rule a separate part, which would thus become his own share and all under his own authority" This Empress, Gregoras goes on to explain, "was by birth one of the Latins (she was a Montferrat princess) and took over this innovation from them, intending to introduce it amongst the Romans."⁸⁴ These reproaches are a characteristic expression of traditional Byzantine concepts of the state. But what is not less characteristic and reminds us of the real condition of affairs at that time is that only a few years later the partition of the Empire did nevertheless take place. After the civil war had broken out the old Emperor was constrained to agree to a division of territory between himself and his grand-

⁸⁰ See the letter of the *protonotarios* of Michael VIII to the representatives of the Papal See of the year 1279, in which the following is said of Nicephorus I, despot of Epirus, and of the Thessalian *sebastocrator* John I: *Subditi, servi et submanuales imperii, sacramentum domino meo sancto imperatori fidelitatis et ligii homagii multoties prestiterunt de parendis preceptis et mandatis suis, a quo dignitates et officia quibus nominati sunt, hactenus acceperunt.* Buchon, *Recherches historiques sur la Principauté française de Morée et ses hautes baronnies*, I (Paris, 1845), 261 note 3. Cf. A. Solovjev, "Fessalijskie arkhonty v XIV veke," *Byzantinosl.*, 4 (1932), 164 note 26; D. Zakythinos, "Processus de féodalisation," *L'Hellénisme contemporain* (Nov.-Dec. 1948), 505; N. Svoronos, *op. cit.*, 140.

⁸¹ Pachymeres, ed. Bonn, I, 321.8.

⁸² Cf. Ostrogorsky, *Féodalité*, 100, for further examples of such possessions held by members of the Palaeologan dynasty, and the extended application of the concept of *pronoia*.

⁸³ Cf. Charanis, "Social Structure," 106; "Aristocracy," 352f.

⁸⁴ Nicephorus Gregoras, ed. Bonn, I, 233-4.

son, Andronicus III.⁸⁵ At the same period his sons appeared in Salonica in the capacity of his vicegerents: first the Despot Constantine, then the Despot Demetrius.⁸⁶

After the civil war of the 1340's, in the reign of John VI Cantacuzene, the granting of appanages to younger members of the imperial family became something of a system. John Cantacuzene allotted to his eldest son Matthew a considerable appanage in western Thrace, extending from Didymoteichus to the outskirts of Christopolis; that is to say, right up to the Serbian frontier of those times. He later made this appanage over to his son-in-law John V Palaeologus—granting to Matthew the region of Adrianople—and entrusted the Byzantine lands in the Morea, which had by now also acquired the characteristics of an appanage, to his youngest son, the Despot Manuel. Thessaly, in the hands of the *sebastocrator* John Angelus, also had in all essentials this appanage character; the Emperor had entrusted its government to John in 1342, regulating the details of his rights and obligations in a special chrysobull.⁸⁷

The dismemberment of the Empire proceeded apace. By the end of John V's reign, with all its internal strife, neither the unity of the Empire nor unity of government could really be said to exist any longer. Of course, John V had his residence in Constantinople, as the formal head of the Empire; but the towns on the Propontis, remnants of the Byzantine possessions in Thrace, were now the appanage of his eldest son Andronicus IV, the region around Salonica was the appanage of his second son Manuel II, whilst the Morea had become that of his third son, the Despot Theodore.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ In spite of the energetic opposition shown by Andronicus II to the plans of his Latin wife, these plans were not in reality as alien to the Byzantines as Gregoras affirms in his tirade. According to the same Gregoras (I, 285.7), Andronicus the Younger had at an earlier date been yearning for the independent possession of some part of the Empire.

⁸⁶ We are informed, once again by Gregoras, that the founder of the Palaeologan dynasty, Michael VIII, already had it in mind to set up for his son Constantine an independent rule over the region of Thessalonica, and that this intention would have been carried out had not the Emperor died in the meantime. The formulation used by Gregoras is quite expressive: ἐβούλετο γὰρ...τὸ περὶ Θεσσαλονίκην τε καὶ Μακεδονίαν μέρος τῆς ὅλης ἡγεμονίας Ῥωμαίων ἀποτεμὼν ἰδίαν ἀρχὴν τινα περιποιήσασθαι τοῦτω καὶ βασιλείον αὐτοκρατορίαν (I, 187.18).

⁸⁷ Cantacuzene cites this chrysobull in his History, II, 312–22. The main points of this remarkable document are summarized by A. Solovjev, *op. cit.*, 164f., and Zakythinos, *op. cit.*, 506ff., who remarks, "Nulle part ailleurs les traits féodaux ne se dessinent avec tant d'évidence" (*ibid.*, 514). On John Angelus (who was probably the first cousin rather than the nephew of John Cantacuzene), see the entry in D. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus)*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, XI (Washington, D.C., 1968), No. 37, 147f. On the title of *sebastocrator* received by him after the accession of Cantacuzene, see Ferjančić, *op. cit.*, 184ff.

⁸⁸ In the last decades of the Empire's existence, Byzantine Morea was in turn divided into several parts, ruled by some of the numerous sons of the Emperor Manuel II. Each one of these was in full possession of his own appanage. The status of the Morea is studied in detail in the well-known work by D. Zakythinos, *Le despotat grec de Morée*, II (Athens, 1953), esp. 71ff., and in a more recent but insufficiently known book in Serbian by B. Ferjančić concerning the despots in Byzantium and the South Slav countries (*Despoti u Vizantiji i južnoslovenskim zemljama* [Belgrade, 1960], esp. 126ff.) who rightly emphasizes the analogies between the status of the Morea and other appanage possessions of that period. The recognition of the Emperor's superior rights did not limit in practice the independence of the holders of such appanages. They stood at the head of the armed forces, the administration and the judicial apparatus of their region. They concluded treaties with other governments to which they could grant commercial privileges and at times make territorial concessions. They exchanged landed possessions among each other: not only did parts of the Morea change hands, but occasionally these were traded for possessions on the Black Sea coast and *vice versa*. When the Emperor became the vassal of the Turkish sultan, this did not entail similar obligations on the part of the rulers of the Morea:

To this list of semi-autonomous regions we may add one more principality of similar character. It was created at the end of the 1350's by two brothers, the grand *stratopedarch* Alexius and the grand *primicerius* John. The story of these two Byzantine aristocrats and the towns which they conquered is highly instructive. It throws a vivid light on the condition of the Empire at that time, and on the part which some members of the higher aristocracy were able to play in determining its fate:

After the collapse of the empire of Stephen Dušan (d. 1355) the Byzantines had an opportunity of seizing the offensive and trying to recover at least some part of what they had lost at the hands of the mighty Serbian ruler. Attempts to do this were made, but what is remarkable is that not one of them was originated by the central authority of the Empire. It was a matter of separate and uncoordinated initiatives by the great feudal lords. From Thrace Matthew Cantacuzene invaded the region of Philippi, but was soon utterly crushed and handed over to his rival, the Emperor John Palaeologus, by the Serbian Caesar Vojichna, the Lord of Drama (1357). The former ruler of Epirus, the Despot Nicephorus II, the descendant of earlier rulers in northern Greece and son-in-law of John Cantacuzene, won some impressive successes at first; supported by the local Greek aristocracy, he restored his power in Thessaly and Epirus but met with opposition from the Albanians and died in battle against them (1358). Only the grand *stratopedarch* Alexius and the grand *primicerius* John were able to achieve more solid results in their campaign on the north Aegean coast, and I should like to say something more about this campaign.⁸⁹

Until a short time ago the origins and personalities of these brothers were a puzzle. The historians have nothing whatever to say about them and the documents usually give only their Christian names and titles, not mentioning their family. It has, however, become clear that these "personnages mystérieux" (as Lemerle calls them), these "frères énigmatiques" (to quote Zakythinios) bore the name of Palaeologus and were the sons of the grand domestic Demetrius Palaeologus.⁹⁰ In the documents the younger brother, John is consistently called the brother-in-law (γαμβρός) of the Emperor—in fact, he bore this relationship not to the Emperor but to the Empress Helena Cantacuzene, and not through her sister but through her cousin Anna Asan. Indeed, the kinship of these brothers to the Emperor was, it would seem, a very distant one, and their claim to belong to the family of Palaeologus somewhat forced.

the Despot Theodore I recognized the sultan's higher authority considerably later than did his father, the Emperor John V.

Quite characteristic in this respect are the conditions that arose in the area of Thessalonica when, after the battle of Angora, it was returned to Byzantium by the provisions of an agreement concluded with Suleiman (1405). Manuel II transferred this region to his co-ruler and rival John VII. The two emperors signed an agreement to this effect and confirmed it by oath. Manuel II describes this agreement as an ὀρκωτικόν, as he does the prior agreement with Suleiman. Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, "Byzance état tributaire de l'Empire turc," *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, 5 (1958), 54.

⁸⁹ The activity of the brothers Alexius and John was first pointed out and partly elucidated by P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale à l'époque chrétienne et byzantine* (Paris, 1945), 206ff.

⁹⁰ Cf. G. Ostrogorskiy, *Serska oblast posle Dušanove smrti* (Belgrade, 1965), 149ff., on the basis of a document of their mother, Anna Cantacuzena Palaiologina, dated August 1373, ed. Ktenas, 'Επετ. 'Εταιρ. Βυζ. Σπουδῶν, 4 (1927), No. 8, 300–305.

Still, adorned as they were with exalted titles, joined by close or distant ties of kinship to the powerful families of Palaeologus, Cantacuzene, and Asan, they manifestly belonged to the highest Byzantine aristocracy. Taking advantage of the situation which prevailed after the death of Dušan, these two young Byzantine noblemen launched an offensive in the coastal region of eastern Macedonia and achieved some notable successes.

In 1356 or early in 1357 they managed to win back the coastal towns of Chrysopolis and Anaktoropolis, which had been occupied by the Serbs in Dušan's reign, and also the island of Thasos.⁹¹ Moreover, shortly afterward, in 1357 or 1358, they recovered Christopolis (Kavalla), the most important point on the north Aegean coast.⁹² There, however, their successes came to an end, and the inland region of eastern Macedonia remained under the control of the Serbian principality of Serres.

The grand *stratopedarch* Alexius and the grand *primicerius* John recognized the sovereign rights of their Emperor, and they were, formally, his loyal servants. Yet—and this is the most interesting aspect of the matter—the Byzantine government had, seemingly, no part in their enterprise. Alexius and John acted on their own, with their own forces, and it is not surprising that they personally benefited from their conquests. By a chrysobull of March 9, 1357, which has survived in an Italian translation, the Emperor John V Palaeologus granted them Christopolis, Anaktoropolis, and the island of Thasos as their personal property; that is to say, he sanctioned the *status quo*, formally conceding to the conquerors what they already held.⁹³ The charter whereby they were accorded authority over Christopolis has not survived, but later Greek documents call them the *archontes* of that city⁹⁴ and a Venetian document of 10 January 1373 sent to the grand *primicerius* John (his elder brother had died by then) is addressed *domino Christopoli*.⁹⁵ The Venetians clearly understood that the conquered towns were only formally under the sovereignty of the Emperor and that their real lords were those who had won them back. The reoccupied towns were for a long time in the joint possession of the brothers Alexius and John Palaeologus, and after the death of Alexius (about 1370) they remained under the control of his younger brother right up to their occupation by the Turks. In his will, dated 1384, John mentions only his domains on the

⁹¹ Cf. Lemerle, *op. cit.*, 206f.

⁹² Contrary to the prevailing opinion that Christopolis remained under Byzantine rule and was not affected by Dušan's conquests, I believe I have been able to prove that it was in fact occupied by Dušan and was later won back by precisely the brothers Alexius and John. See *Serska oblast*, 25ff. The emotional and altogether confused "critique" of this conclusion in the book of K. Chionēs, 'Ιστορία τῆς Καβάλλας (Kavalla, 1968), 99ff., cannot be taken seriously.

⁹³ Lemerle, *op. cit.*, 206. A month later, John V likewise confirmed by his chrysobull of April 1357 the two brothers' rights of ownership over the *kellion* of Rhabdouchos on Mt. Athos, which became the kernel of the Pantocrator monastery built by them. Cf. *Actes de Pantocrator*, ed. L. Petit, *VizVrem*, 10 (1903), Suppl., No. 2. This chrysobull expressed merely the spiritual authority of the Byzantine Emperor, for, in fact, Mt. Athos had been for more than ten years under Serbian rule. The *protos* Dorotheos, from whom the brothers Alexius and John received the above-mentioned *kellion*, was also a Serb.

⁹⁴ Cf. the decree of the Patriarch Philotheos of 1365: Miklosich and Müller, I, 476.

⁹⁵ Lemerle, *op. cit.*, 209f. In the Venetian documents the names of John and Alexius are confused. Lemerle has ingeniously explained how this confusion arose.

island of Thasos (the towns on the mainland were already in Turkish hands) and these he bequeathes to the monastery of the Pantocrator on Athos, which he and his brother had founded.⁹⁶

There is a contemporary hagiographic source which tells us of an interesting episode in the life of the grand *primicerius* John, which supplements the data provided by the documents. After the disaster on the Maritza River in September 1371 ("after the destruction of the despot Uglješa at the hands of the Ishmaelites")—the *Life of St. Niphon* relates—the Turks fitted out a squadron and moved against Mount Athos with arms taken from the defeated Serbs and with siege engines. Everyone under attack was seized with panic, and even the grand *primicerius* John was unable to offer any resistance. But suddenly three large and heavily-armed Venetian ships turned up—in answer, the *Life* would have us believe, to the prayers of St. Niphon. They had come to the assistance of John, and the combined forces scattered the Turks.⁹⁷ Thus, the grand *primicerius*, lord of the north Aegean coastal towns, and founder of one of the monasteries on Mount Athos appears in the guise of a protector of the Holy Mountain, watches over the security of its monasteries, and is ready to come to their defense; when his own powers turn out to be inadequate, he makes an alliance with stronger ones. That his forces were somewhat limited is evident from the fact that three Venetian ships decided the battle.

What sort of power and authority did the brothers Alexius and John Palaeologus exercise over their lands? It is quite clear that these two aristocrats (and, after 1370, one of them) ruled over the towns on the mainland and on Thasos just as the Emperor's sons had ruled over their various possessions in the Propontis, Salonica, and the Peloponnese. Another question is equally relevant; what was the nature of the armed forces, with the aid of which they carried out their warlike undertakings? We find an answer in the will of the grand *primicerius* John, already referred to. In it he shows an especial solicitude for—what he calls—"my people" (τῶν κατ' ἐμαυτὸν), those who had helped him and fought for him and his late brother.⁹⁸ He calls them the "sons" and "brothers" of his soul, and he was their common father and brother. "They labored greatly," he writes, "they came to our help and co-operated with us in every way they could and showed themselves most loyal and benevolent in their dealings with us, frequently exposing their very lives to all kinds of peril."⁹⁹ It is clear that he is referring to his retinue, the trusty followers who accompanied a feudal seigneur on his campaigns.

This brings us back to the question already touched upon—the feudal retinue in Byzantium. The words of John Palaeologus are the more valuable in that they tell us about the social status of members of his retinue. His com-

⁹⁶ *Actes de Pantocrator*, No. 6.

⁹⁷ F. Halkin, "La Vie de St. Niphon," *AnalBoll*, 58 (1940), 24-25. The panic that occurred on Mt. Athos after the battle of the Maritza, and the flight of the monks are mentioned in another contemporary hagiographic document: see F. Halkin, "Un ermite des Balkans au XIV^e siècle. La vie grecque inédite de S. Romylos," *Byzantion*, 31 (1961), 142-43. Cf. now G. Ostrogorskij, "Sveta Gora posle Maričke bitke," *Zbornik Filoz. fakulteta*, 10/1 (Belgrade, 1970), 277 ff.

⁹⁸ *Actes de Pantocrator*, No. 6, 123.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 124-27.

panions in arms were no mere dependent *paroikoi*, and in committing them after his death to the care of the monastery of the Pantocrator, the grand *primitivus* emphasizes that they are to serve it not "out of any dependent or servile obligation" but rather prompted by their own free choice and the protection they would enjoy from the monastery (οὐ λόγῳ παροικίας ἢ δουλείας τινός... ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἐλευθερίας καὶ δυνατῆς περιθάλψεως).¹⁰⁰ If they so choose, they are authorized to lay down their charge in connection with the monastery and depart from its lands.

We have already considered a number of instances where earlier Byzantine narrative sources testify to the existence of the feudal retinue, and such sources are no less enlightening, in this respect, when we come to the fourteenth century. For instance, Nicephorus Gregoras tells us that in 1342 the forces of John Cantacuzene consisted of 2,000 assorted warriors and cavalry, on the one hand, and on the other, "his kinsmen and other nobles, who, together with the members of their retinue (ἅμα ὁπόσοι τῆς σφῶν θεραπείας ἦσαν) came in number to something like 500."¹⁰¹ Referring to the same period, there is a passage in John Cantacuzene about the forces of his rivals, then advancing on Salonica; they were joined by the eparch Monomachus "with his own people" (ἅμα τοῖς οἰκείοις).¹⁰²

The idea of Byzantium is usually associated with the picture of a powerful centralized state, which had at its disposal a vast bureaucratic machine, operating with a high degree of perfection. Such a picture did once correspond with the facts, but, over the centuries, developments drastically modified these facts and nothing was left of the power and glory of earlier times except a few pathetic survivals, proud memories, and pretensions that could not be realized. Just as the Empire of the last Palaeologi was very different from that of Basil II, both in its extent and its power, so does the structure of the later Byzantine State, as described by Pseudo-Codinus in the mid-fourteenth century, bear little resemblance to the imposing apparatus of government that is reflected in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *Book of Ceremonies*.

In the earlier sense of the term, this "apparatus of government" had ceased to exist. Offices of the highest importance had become mere honorific titles, which no longer carried any defined obligations, and all recollection of their earlier significance had been wiped out. Pseudo-Codinus tells us, for instance, that the eparch no longer exercises any functions, that the duties of the logothete τοῦ γενικοῦ are unknown to him, and that the logothete of the drome *did* have some sort of official obligations once upon a time, but what these were he cannot say—in any case, this personage no longer has any official function.¹⁰³ The titles of Byzantine dignitaries as they appear in the lists of Pseudo-Codinus and in contemporary documents, are something halfway between the earlier functions and mere empty appellations, and they serve

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, line 141.

¹⁰¹ Gregoras, II, 628.2.

¹⁰² Cantac., II, 236.12. Cf. F. Barišić, "Mihailo Monomah, eparh i veliki kontostavl," *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, 11 (1968), 229.

¹⁰³ Pseudo-Kodinos, ed. J. Verpeaux (Paris, 1966), 176.15, 178.10, 24.

primarily to denote the rank of those who hold them. This was the only essential point left. Things were falling apart, but the proper hierarchical order amongst those who clustered around the emperor must still be strictly maintained.

The circle of these courtiers was, however, by now a very narrow one. They were representatives of a number of aristocratic families, linked among themselves by ties of blood or marriage and—the crucial point—attached by such bonds to the dynasty itself, the first and foremost of aristocratic families. Among the emperor's "own people," his *οἰκεῖοι*, persons who held the most honored position, and represented the very highest level of the notables of the Empire, were those who were privileged to consider themselves his kith and kin. These he would call not merely his "own people" but his "well-loved uncles, cousins, brother-in-law, nephews," and so on.¹⁰⁴ If we compare the number of those styled, in the documents, as merely his "own people" with those who are specifically stated to be his kinsmen, we shall soon notice that from the mid-fourteenth century onward the proportion tilts sharply in favor of the latter.¹⁰⁵ In the highest ranks the dignitaries mentioned are almost exclusively those who are related to the dynasty, either genuine kinsmen or those who could count themselves such by virtue of the generous interpretation which the Byzantines customarily applied to degrees of affinity. In short, the Clan Palaeologus ruled the remnants of the Byzantine Empire.

To conclude this brief historical sketch I should like in a few words to portray the typical Byzantine nobleman. As a social type, how will he appear to us? Generally, he would be, first and foremost, an imperial dignitary, the bearer of a title of honor which defined his place in the court hierarchy, and he would perform some function in the service of the State, a function precisely defined in the great days of the administrative system, but which had become rather

¹⁰⁴ The epithet "beloved" (περιπόθητος) was applied only to dignitaries who were considered to be the emperor's relatives, not to ordinary *οἰκεῖοι*. This has been noted by J. Verpeaux, "Les *οἰκεῖοι*. Notes d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale," *REByz.*, 23 (1965), 97. He admits, however, having found one *οἰκεῖος καὶ πεφιλημένος τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου*, namely the grand domestic Raoul under Andronicus III. The explanation of this case is quite simple: the act in question (A. Guillou, *Les archives de Saint-Jean-Prodrôme sur le Mont Ménéce* [Paris, 1955], No. 25) was in reality issued not by Andronicus III, but by the Serbian Emperor Stephen Dušan. Cf. G. Ostrogorsky, "Alexios Raul, Grossdomestikos von Serbien," *Festschrift P. E. Schramm* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 340 ff.

¹⁰⁵ In his richly documented article, Verpeaux (*op. cit.*, 95) notes that in the acts of Andronicus II and Andronicus III, the *οἰκεῖοι* outnumber imperial relatives, but he also observes that "the acts of John V mention, almost exclusively, relatives," without, however, drawing any conclusions from this fact. In general, Verpeaux was inclined to underestimate the distinction between these two groups. He pointed out, for example, that the titles of *panhypersebastos* and *protovestiarios* were not conferred on ordinary *οἰκεῖοι*, but that the latter could receive the high dignity of grand domestic. He quotes in evidence an example from a Chilandar document (*Actes grecs de Chilandar*, No. 131) which mentions an *οἰκεῖος τῇ βασιλείᾳ μου μέγας δομέστικος κύρις Στέφανος ὁ Χρέλης*. This instance is not convincing, since Chrelis or Relja was a Serbian magnate who went over temporarily to the Byzantine side and naturally could not have been a relative of the Byzantine emperor; just as the grand domestic Alexius Raoul who joined the Serbian side (see previous note) could not have been a relative of the Serbian emperor. On the other hand, we are unable to name a single Byzantine grand domestic in the service of the Byzantine government at that time who was not related to his emperor. Concerning Relja see the valuable study of M. Dinić, "Relja Ohmućević, istorija i predanje," *Zbornik radova Viz. Inst.*, 9 (1966), 95 ff.

vague in the period of its disintegration. "Do not refuse to serve, or to hold positions of command in the themes" is the advice of Cecaumenus; "know this, that the post of duty comes as a blessing from God."¹⁰⁶ In the great days of the Empire, military, civil, and court positions belonged to clearly differentiated, but not mutually exclusive, categories. Civilians, and even court dignitaries often not merely took part in military campaigns, but held command in them. We find in Byzantium (and this, of course, holds true for the Middle Ages as a whole) that the art of war was really the principal occupation of the aristocracy; so the nobleman, be he a member of the imperial family or a simple *pronoïar*, was, in the nature of things, a warrior.

As a rule, the Byzantine nobleman was a landowner, and landholding was the economic foundation of the aristocracy's position. Let us hear Cecaumenus once more: "There is no source of revenue which stands above the cultivation of land."¹⁰⁷ Landholding was not merely a profitable occupation and the most natural one for the nobleman to follow; it was the only one befitting the dignity of his rank. It is true that for the most part, aristocratic landowners lived in the towns, above all in Constantinople, and were content there to receive the revenues from their lands; but, of course they also paid visits to their estates where they had their "lordly manors."¹⁰⁸ The nobleman's lands were cultivated by his dependent peasants (*paroikoi*) who paid him their dues and fulfilled certain labor obligations. Thus, every aristocratic landowner was the seigneur and unlimited master over the dependent peasant population which was settled on his lands. The higher aristocracy were as much set apart by the great size of their estates, often enormous, by the numbers of their *paroikoi*, and by the value of their revenues as they were by their positions at court and their resounding titles of honor.

But to belong to the aristocracy was not only a matter of birth, exalted rank, and wealth; it also necessarily implied participation in the refined Greek culture of the time. This sense of cultural participation, which R. Jenkins has described so penetratingly,¹⁰⁹ was especially characteristic of the higher Byzantine aristocracy, who formed the educated *élite* of the Empire. The ability to write in a florid classical language which was thought to be that of the ancient Greek writers, philosophers, and orators distinguished this *élite* from ordinary mortals even more than did noble ancestry. We may recall Constantine Porphyrogenitus reproaching his father-in-law Romanus Lecapenus, first, for being "a common, illiterate fellow" (ιδιώτης καὶ ἀγράμματος ἄνθρωπος ἦν) and, second, because he was not "of imperial and noble stock" (οὔτε ἀπὸ γένους βασι-

¹⁰⁶ Cecaumenus, par. 111, p. 47.1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 88, p. 36.12.

¹⁰⁸ We may recall the οικήματα δεσποτικά of the *sebastocrator* Isaac Comnenus at Neocastron, the center of his possessions near Ainos (see *supra*, p. 16). Anna Comnena (*Alex.*, ed. Leib, II, 171.10) relates that the young Constantine Doucas entertained the Emperor Alexius on his estate near Ephesus, where he had houses "suitable for receiving an emperor" (ἀποχρῶντα οικήματα ἔχοντα πρὸς τὴν βασιλείᾳ ὑποδοχήν).

¹⁰⁹ R. J. H. Jenkins, *Byzantium and Byzantinism*. Lectures in Memory of Louise Taft Semple (Cincinnati, 1963), 8ff. Cf. also his important article, "The Hellenistic Origins of Byzantine Literature," *DOP*, 17 (1963), 37ff.

λικοῦ καὶ εὐγενοῦς).¹¹⁰ Culture and education came first, outweighing lineage. And, in fact, even in later times, when the Empire was more strongly differentiated socially, it was easier for a social parvenu from the dregs of society to be assimilated into the ranks of the aristocracy than it would have been for an "illiterate fellow," a cultural parvenu who was a total stranger to Greek learning and wisdom.

But, despite being people of Greek culture, the Byzantine aristocracy were not always Greek in origin. As is well known, there were to be found amongst them not a few representatives of the other ethnic groups who lived within the bounds of the racially variegated Empire. One might suppose that such men, having spent their lives in the service of the Byzantine State and having become assimilated to Greek culture, must have come to forget their ethnic origins; but in fact this was not always the case. Let us look, for instance, at the Georgian Gregory Pacurianos, an outstanding Byzantine personality and a notable military figure, who especially distinguished himself under Alexius I Comnenus. He helped this Emperor to ascend the throne, and received in return the exalted title of Grand Domestic of the West. He was further rewarded with the grant of extensive lands. He often led Byzantine armies to victory, and he perished on the field of battle, defending the Empire against the Pechenegs. Yet, when he founded the celebrated monastery of Bačkovo, which still exists in the Rhodopean mountains, not far from Plovdiv in modern Bulgaria, he laid it down that no "Roman" priests or monks should be admitted into it. He explains his reasons for making this unexpected and rather startling prohibition. "The Romans," he says in the *typicon* which he drew up for his monastery, "are violent by nature, deceitful, and grasping" (βίαιοι ὄντες καὶ περίλογοι καὶ πλεονέκται), and he is afraid lest they somehow or other gain control of the monastery and turn it into their own property, something which, as he affirms, he has often known to happen.¹¹¹ In admitting monks, care must be taken to preserve a preponderance of Iberians "our kinsmen, who are near to us by blood"; to these he gives preference over "strangers and foreigners" (τοὺς ξένους καὶ τοὺς ἐξωτερικούς).¹¹² So it appears that this Byzantine magnate, who had had a brilliant career in the imperial service, was rewarded with many marks of imperial favor, and finally made the supreme sacrifice for his Emperor, felt himself to be an alien in the ruling circles of the "Romans," men whom his inner judgment condemned and toward whom he nurtured

¹¹⁰ *De Administrando imperio* (rev. ed.), ed. Moravcsik-Jenkins, Dumbarton Oaks Texts, I (Washington, D.C., 1967), chap. 13, 149-52.

¹¹¹ "Typikon de Grégoire Pacourianos pour le monastère de Pétritzos (Bačkovo) en Bulgarie," ed. L. Petit, *VizVrem*, 11 (1904), Suppl., No. 1, par. 24, pp. 44-45. One is not, of course, to imagine that Pacurianos was specifically empowered to forbid to Greeks access to his monastery, or that he included in the typicon this provision (as well as its motivation?) with the knowledge and consent of the Emperor. Yet such was the opinion of Marr who explained the granting of these "exceptional rights" to Pacurianos on the supposition that his Georgian monastery had the special mission of helping the Byzantine government in its struggle against Armenian Paulicians. See N. Marr, "Arkaun, mongol'skoe nazvanie christian, v svjazi s voprosom ob armjanach-chalkedonitach," *VizVrem*, 12 (1906), 17ff., esp. 25; cf. *idem*, "Ioann Petricskij, grusinzkij neoplatonik XI-XII veka," *Zapiski vostočnogo otd. Imper. Russk. Archeol. Obšč.*, 19 (1910), 53ff.

¹¹² "Typikon de Grégoire Pacourianos," par. 25, p. 45.

jaundiced feelings. Of course, we should not too readily generalize from this instance; but neither can we simply treat it as of no significance.¹¹³ The binding force of Greek culture and the Orthodox faith was indisputably great; but, however powerful these unifying factors may have been, it seems that they could not wholly counteract internal differences and tensions.

Whilst revering Greek culture, the aristocrat, like every Byzantine, was usually devoted to the Orthodox faith and Church. Generally speaking, he would have an unshakable belief in the truth and the saving grace of Orthodoxy, and would reject every other confession as heresy. He would zealously perform the rites and obligations of his Church. These were the things that most of all shaped his view of the world and the pattern of his daily life. The gulf which generally separated the aristocracy and the lower orders was bridged in these matters. The aristocrat, no less than other Byzantines, was moved to make material sacrifices for the Church by the desire to save his soul. Naturally, the scale of his sacrifices tended to be more impressive than that of humbler folk. For the rich aristocrat, a man in the public eye, it was, in its way, a matter of honor to found a monastery, to be its *ktitor*, and the more magnificent the foundation, the greater the prestige accruing to the founder. So it was (to recall examples we have already touched on) with the Grand Domestic Gregory Pacurianos and the monastery of Bačkovo, with the *sebastocrator* Isaac Comnenus and the monastery of the Theotokos Kosmosoteira near Ainos, and with those brothers Alexius and John Palaeologus, the founders of the Pantocrator on Athos. To personal ambition and the pride of caste were often added visions of material gain, especially clear, perhaps in the case of those who undertook the administration of monasteries as *charistikarii*.

In following the development of the Byzantine aristocracy, we have seen how, as a class, they persistently increased their wealth, how their privileges were enlarged, and how their political influence grew. But this does not, of course, necessarily hold true of every individual nobleman. All through the history of the Empire we come across members of this class whose fortunes rose and fell sharply. Any of them might lose his wealth and position from one day to the next, no one could insure himself against the vicissitudes of fate, if only because the fortunes of all of them, even the mightiest, and not excluding members of the dynasty, depended on the will of an autocrat, who rewarded or punished as he saw fit according to his own whim or at a hint from below. The climate of fear, the constant dread of denunciation and of tale-bearing which were naturally engendered in these conditions are vividly conveyed in the "Counsels and Tales" of that same Cecaumenus whom I have already quoted more than once. To maintain silence—that is the most persistent piece

¹¹³ Especially since an analogous situation may be found in the Life of Sts. John and Euthymius, founders of the Iviron monastery on Mount Athos, written in the middle of the eleventh century by George the Athonite. See A. Šanidze, "Stranica iz istorijata na gruzino-bŭlgarskite kulturni vzaimootonošenija," *Istoričeski pregled*, 14 (1958), 98ff., where an interesting passage from this Life is quoted in Bulgarian translation: "The Greeks . . . by all possible means attempted to extirpate the Georgians from this monastery" (*op. cit.*, 100–101).

of advice offered by this experienced and cautious man.¹¹⁴ "Avoid conversing with dissolute folk," he warns, "and be on your guard when talking to your companions or to anyone else. Should the discussion turn to the Emperor or the Empress, then do not reply at all, but leave the company. I have known many who imperilled themselves in this matter."¹¹⁵ He is dogged by feelings of distrust toward those around him. "You should be more wary of friends than of foes"¹¹⁶—such are the words with which this Byzantine nobleman of the eleventh century concludes his homily.

Silence surrounded the person of the emperor, not only during court ceremonies and as a mark of greater solemnity and reverence, but also in the doings of everyday life, a silence prompted by ordinary human feelings of fear and the desire for self-preservation. Cecaumenus has depicted this aspect of Byzantine life from close up and with great vividness. It is, unquestionably, an essential part of the picture, if a rather dark one, and something which cannot be omitted in considering the history, in many ways so brilliant and colorful, of Byzantine society, and more particularly, of the Byzantine aristocracy.

¹¹⁴ Especially expressive is the admonition in par. 12, p. 14: πάση φυλακῇ τήρησόν σου τὸ στόμα.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 6, p. 4.3-6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 226, p. 80.5 and par. 73, p. 27.5; cf. par. 74, p. 28.7.